

# Progress Report Rural Action Plan

A Rural Economic Development Strategy for Prince Edward Island



Prince  
Edward  
Island  
CANADA

ONE ISLAND COMMUNITY



ONE ISLAND FUTURE

**Technical Support:**

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*Organization and Communication:* Department of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development

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## PROGRESS REPORT - RURAL ACTION PLAN

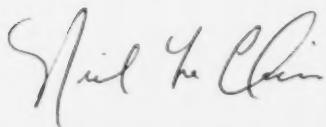
In January of 2010, Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development Minister Neil LeClair announced a new five-year rural economic development strategy for Prince Edward Island. The Rural Action Plan brings a government-wide focus to rural issues in an effort to ensure that the needs and aspirations of rural residents are taken into account in all government policies. It is the first time that the future of rural communities is being addressed in a comprehensive manner.

The Rural Action Plan marks the beginning of a new era in Prince Edward Island for rural revitalization and renewal. It sets out a vision for prosperous, vibrant and healthy rural communities that are able to adapt to a changing world and to offer diverse opportunities and a high quality of life to all its citizens. The plan established seven broad goals and 40 corresponding actions.

Of the 40 actions identified in the Rural Action Plan, a total of 30 have now been completed or are underway. Plans are being developed to address the other 10 actions.

This report outlines the progress that has been achieved during the first year of the Rural Action Plan.

"As minister responsible for rural development, I am proud of the progress that has been achieved over the past year under the Rural Action Plan. I look forward to continuing to work with rural businesses, organizations and residents to build on the progress that has been achieved."



Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development



# Goal 1

## Enhance Business Development

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## Goal 1: Enhance Business Development

The following actions have been completed:

- The first Rural Action Centre has been established in Montague. Work is also nearing completion on the opening of centres in Bedeque and Alberton, with a presence in Souris and Wellington.
- An Island-wide rural broadband system has been established. This enables rural residents and businesses to access high-speed internet service, enabling the development of new opportunities to access information and expand markets.
- The rural broadband fund has been established in partnership with Bell Aliant to help businesses adopt innovation-based communications and information technologies.

The actions taken in support of this goal will help to achieve two other actions. These include the development of a business services outreach program based at the Rural Action Centres to actively engage with businesses and business leaders throughout rural Prince Edward Island to identify needs and opportunities. There is also greater coordination between various departments and Innovation PEI to increase the participation of rural businesses in the development and commercialization of new and innovative products.



## Goal 2: Strengthen Primary Sectors and Natural Resources

The following actions have been completed or are under way:

- a \$1 million fund has been established to help the agriculture industry diversify, become more competitive and develop new value-added products. A new \$3.2 million fund has been established with a federal contribution for a three-year research program to evaluate soybean varieties that are suitable for Prince Edward Island growing conditions. Already, record-high soybean production has been achieved to respond to market opportunities for non-GMO soybeans in Japan.
- a \$9.2 million fund has been established to develop on-farm renewable energy systems to enable producers to become more competitive. A portion of this funding is being directed to evaluate new crops such as fall rye and perennial grasses as sources for renewable energy.
- A low interest loan program has been established for all eligible fishers in Prince Edward Island who are facing increased costs and lower prices. A total of \$36 million has been committed under this program, with savings to fishers of more than \$10 million over the life of the program.
- In partnership with the federal government, a \$4 million investment is being made in the development of new fish products, processing technologies and markets. This supports increased innovation in the fishery and the development of new markets which will result in greater stability, increased efficiency and higher returns.
- The Department of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development has supported industry-led efforts to rationalize the fishery. Sustainability plans have been completed for all lobster fishery areas. In LFA 25, more than 30 licenses have been retired. Funding is being pursued for the implementation of industry-led sustainability plans in LFAs 24 and 26A.
- The Future Fishers program has been established. This past year, close to 40 new entrants have taken over existing fleets and are now actively involved in the fishery. New entrants are being accepted during the second year of the program.
- The Department of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development has increased its support for oyster enhancement programs on both public beds and private leases. The oyster industry supports more than 1,000 slanders and has significant potential for growth. The department is also working closely with the industry on efforts to more effectively manage aquatic invasive species.
- The provincial government is providing support for the development of mussel processing facilities in the province and for producing finfish in containment facilities.

## Goal 2: Strengthen Primary Sectors and Natural Resources

- The provincial government has accepted two proposals to supply biomass-based heat for five public buildings. This will increase the supply of energy from local biomass and reduce energy costs.

- Another action currently underway is the conduct of a province-wide forest inventory which will be completed in 2012 as a component of the State of the Forest Report. This will support improved long-term management of the province's forest resources.

The provincial government is continuing to work with the federal government and private-sector partners to expand wind energy capacity in Prince Edward Island. As well, the introduction of a new energy agreement for Prince Edward Island will reduce electrical costs for residents and businesses by 14 percent. This will be of major importance to rural Islanders. We also recognized that our urban and rural regions have unique strengths, needs and opportunities.



# Goal 3

## Expanding Tourism

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## Goal 3: Expanding Tourism

The following actions have been completed:

- In order to expand tourism, a province-wide Fall Flavours Festival has been established to promote events and visitation to rural areas. Support has been provided to events such as the Festival of Small Halls and the Cavendish Beach Music Festival. Book PEI has been established to utilize the new rural broadband service in accessing an online reservation system.
- The Culinary Alliance has been established to promote Prince Edward Island cuisine to visitors and expand export markets for food products. As part of this initiative, a Culinary Trail has been developed to promote food businesses in rural communities.

Work is continuing on the development of a program to support regional tourism associations. As well, plans for the creation of a month-long, province-wide cultural festival to attract visitors to rural communities and extend the tourism season are being developed. An announcement on these two actions is expected in the coming year.



# Goal 4

## Environmental Conservation and the Rural Economy

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## Goal 4: Environmental Conservation and the Rural Economy

The following actions have been completed or are underway:

- Actions are currently underway to protect groundwater and support conservation. The provincial government has adopted the recommendations of the Commission on Nitrates in Groundwater. Measures include the expansion of the Provincial Watershed Program with funding of \$1 million annually, the delivery of payments of \$1 million annually under the Alternative Land Use Services Program to reward landowners for the protection of ecologically sensitive lands and watercourses and the provision of financial and technical support for on-farm conservation projects under the Canada-Prince Edward Island Stewardship Program. The Department of Agriculture is providing significant support for nutrient management planning and will be introducing new tools over the coming year to support land management practices.

- Amendments have been made to the Lands Protection Act to exempt environmentally sensitive land, wetlands, forested areas, hedgerows, grassed headlands and buffer zones from aggregate landholdings.

An implementation plan is now being developed to address the recommendations of the report of the Commissioner on Land Use and Local Governance. Implementation will begin in 2012. This will be the most significant action ever taken to strengthen land use and local governance in the history of the province.



# Goal 5

## Support Community Development and Capacity Building

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## Goal 5: Support Community Development and Capacity Building

The following actions have been completed or are underway:

- Legislation was passed during the fall session of the legislature to establish community economic development investment funds. These funds will provide equity capital to invest in rural businesses.
- In order to increase access to development funds, the Department of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development is administering the six-year, \$27.5 million Island Community Fund to invest in the infrastructure needs of rural communities. Other measures include the community internship program with funding of \$1 million annually, the Work Experience program with payments of \$3 million annually and the Community Development Fund with a budget of up to \$1 million annually.
- The Community Accounts initiative has been established. This provides rural communities with much-needed access to data and statistics to support economic, cultural and social development.
- Three regional development forums were held over the past year to support and encourage information sharing between economic, social and cultural development groups in west Prince, rural Queens and eastern Prince Edward Island.
- The Rural Jobs Initiative has invested approximately \$5.0 million in the past three years to assist businesses and organizations to hire additional employees and to provide employees with broadened job experiences.
- In 2010, investments of more than \$50 million were made to upgrade rural highways, modernize water and sewer systems and recreational and community infrastructure in rural communities. This was the largest-ever investment in capital projects in rural Prince Edward Island.

Work is ongoing with the Population Secretariat to develop rural population strategies. Another initiative is aimed at expanding the role of rural municipalities in development. The implementation of the report on Land Use and Local Governance, as mentioned earlier, will begin in 2012, and will support the needs of rural communities to strengthen their population and tax bases.



# Goal 6

## Human Resources, Education and Essential Services

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## Goal 6: Human Resources, Education and Essential Services

The following actions have been completed or are underway:

- Actions have been taken to develop sustainable health services in rural communities. Measures include a stabilized emergency department in Alberton and a new health clinic in Tyne Valley, new facilities and services for the health centre in O'Leary and the establishment of a new health centre in Murray River. Construction of two new manors in Alberton and Souris was undertaken in 2010.
- To support educational initiatives in rural Prince Edward Island, a new high school was opened in Montague, construction has begun on a new French language school in Rustico and planning is underway for a new K-12 school in Souris.
- The introduction of kindergarten programs and a new provincial child care program was undertaken in a manner that reflects the needs of rural residents. These programs began in 2010.
- A community internship program was established in 2010. This program allows organizations such as business development agencies, regional tourism associations and community groups to hire recent college or university graduates to undertake specific projects or expand programs and services.
- A rural youth conference was held in the spring of 2010 to focus on the needs and ideas of rural young people. The suggestions and recommendations from the conference are being followed up across several government departments.

- In support of the action to invest in educational opportunities in west Prince, Holland College has begun construction of a regional training centre in Alberton while maintaining its presence in Tignish and O'Leary, and is strengthening the delivery of adult education programs.

Planning is now underway to implement two further actions identified in support of this goal. These are the establishment of regional human resource development councils to address rural economic and employment issues and the development of leadership programs to help strengthen community groups and organizations. It is expected that these measures will be implemented in the coming year.



# Goal 7

## One Island Community, One Island Future

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## Goal 7: One Island Community, One Island Future

The provincial government is committed to ensuring that all areas of Prince Edward Island must have greater access to economic development opportunities which reflect their distinct needs and strengths. Action 40 identifies the importance of developing measures to address the challenges in the sub-regions of west Prince, eastern Kings and southeastern Prince Edward Island.

- As part of this action, the Department of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development has relocated to Montague, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to Summerside and some sections of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal to Tignish.

The provincial government has made a commitment to provide special measures to support further economic development in these sub-regions.



## 2010 - 2011 Development Resources

In the first year of the Rural Action Plan, more than \$12 million has been allocated by the provincial government to carry out the actions needed to stimulate development in rural Prince Edward Island. All costs were accounted for within the current government fiscal framework.

Provincial government initiatives have had successful uptake as indicated in the following table.

Program	Projects/Positions Approved	Provincial Government Budget
<b>Island Community Fund</b>	67 Projects	\$5,000,000
<b>Community Development Fund</b>	13 Projects	\$704,400
<b>Work Experience PEI</b>	68 Projects / 325 Positions	\$3,500,000
<b>Community Internship</b>	108 Projects/ 138 Positions	\$1,700,000
<b>Rural Jobs Initiative</b>	188 Positions	\$1,681,000

*The Community Internship Program and Work Experience P.E.I. are funded in whole or in part by the Canada P.E.I. Labour Market Agreement.*

It should be noted that in many cases, the provincial contribution leveraged significant federal, municipal, community and private sector investments that would not be possible without the resources of the provincial government. The strength of the Rural Action Plan lies in the realignment of provincial government priorities in a focused and responsible manner within the "One Island Community - One Island Future" vision.

## Summary

The Rural Action Plan sets out a direction for the future of rural communities in Prince Edward Island. With 30 of the 40 proposed actions underway, and measures being developed for the remaining 10, the foundations for the continued development of the social, cultural and economic fabric of rural communities are being strengthened. The actions being carried out over the first five years will lead to stronger communities and longer term growth.

The Rural Action Plan involves all departments of government focused on renewing and revitalizing rural communities. It reflects the commitment of the provincial government to ensure that rural communities become more attractive places in which to live and work.

## Notes

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